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ABSTRACT

A study examined the means of and correlations between perceptions of willingness to communicate, communication competence, communication apprehension, and introversion of college students in the United States and Micronesia. Subjects were 159 undergraduate students enrolled in 19 classes at the Community College of Micronesia on the island of Pohnpei. All of the measures employed were self-report scales: Willingness to Communicate, Self-Perceived Communication Competence, Communication Apprehension, and Introversion. The focus of the study was on the differences between data generated in the United States and Micronesian data. Comparisons indicated significant differences between orientation of students in the two cultures. Micronesian students perceived themselves as more introverted and apprehensive but less competent and willing to communicate than American students. Additional findings indicated that whereas U.S. studies have found no sex differences between male and female subjects, significant sex differences exist between male and female students in Micronesia. Results are interpreted as having both cultural and language bases. (Three tables of data are included, and 22 references are attached.) (Author/MG)

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COMMUNICATION ORIENTATIONS OF MICRONESIAN AND AMERICAN STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the means of and correlations between perceptions of willingness to communicate, communication competence, communication apprehension, and introversion of college students in the United States and Micronesia. Comparisons indicated significant differences between orientation of students in the two cultures. Micronesian students perceived themselves as more introverted and apprehensive but less competent and willing to communicate than American students. Additional findings indicate that significant sex differences exist between male and female students in Micronesia. Results are interpreted as having both cultural and language bases.

North of the equator in the Western Pacific lies a string of over 2500 islands and islets, lying in four major archipelagoes: the Mariana, the Caroline, the Marshall, and the Kiribati Islands. This entire area is called Micronesia or the "Tiny Islands" ("Trust Territory", 1984). These "Tiny Islands," which amount to a little more than 1000 square miles, are the home of more than 149,000 people who make five constitutional governments including the Republic of Belau, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, The Federated States of Micronesia (Yap, Truk, Pohnpei and Kosrae), the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Kiribati Islands. While these political divisions also represent language, ethnic, and cultural differences, many customs and values on the various islands are generally similar (Ashby, 1985).[1]

Since the United States works in concert with Micronesia's three nations, it becomes vitally important to examine the similarities and differences between the two cultures. Because there is a rich cultural and language diversity, it seems appropriate to ask about the communication orientations of Micronesians compared to those of Americans. As Jensen (1970) reminds us, with increased intercultural contact comes the ever increasing opportunity for misunderstandings. By examining these communication orientations of people from various cultures, we broaden our communication abilities

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and enhance potential for improving relationships with people from those cultures. To do this, we need to study those highly relevant orientations known to influence communication behaviors. Research reported by United States researchers suggests Communication Apprehension (CA), Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Introversion, and Self-perceived Communication Competence (SPCC), may be critical communication orientations which differ across cultures.

Although a majority of the research related to these orientations has focused on the general U.S. culture, recent research has been reported on cultures outside the U.S. mainland, including Hawaii, Japan, Micronesia, Korea, Australia, Germany, England, Peoples Republic of China, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Israel, India, the Phillipines, Finland, Taiwan and Sweden (Barraclough, Chirstophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Klopf, 1984; McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, & Richmond, in press; McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishada, 1985). These studies have demonstrated significant differences exist in communication orientations among these cultures.

Klopf (1984) noted that Micronesians are significantly less apprehensive than Hawaiian Americans, and Japanese, but significantly more apprehensive than Koreans and Filipinos, with no difference between them and Australians or Chinese. Klopf (1984) also noted that approximately 22% of the Micronesian respondents in his study reported themselves to be highly apprehensive about communicating. An interesting comparison study was reported by Bruneau, Cambra, and Klopf (1980). This study compared the degree of CA of Micronesian with American students from schools other than in Hawaii. In this study, no significant differences were found between the two groups. Thereby, a question is obvious, do American and Micronesian students differ in their communication orientations with regard to self-reported communication apprehension?

Although identifying the degree of CA experienced by people in a culture is useful because of its close association with communication avoidance (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), CA alone does not provide a comprehensive description of a culture's communication orientation. Therefore, the purpose of this paper has more to do with whether or not people from two different cultures, Micronesia and the United States, are predisposed to be more or less "willing to communicate." Significant correlations between a subject's willingness to communicate and his/her level of apprehension have been observed (e.g., McCroskey & Baer, 1985), but the correlations have not been so substantial to suggest these two constructs are the same thing. Indeed, people in some cultures may be more or less apprehensive, but that does not necessarily indicate they will be more or less willing to communicate. In fact, McCroskey and Richmond (1987) argue that communication apprehension is but one of several potential factors influencing a person's willingness to communicate. Other factors include culture, introversion, self-esteem, and communication competence. Of particular initial concern here is their suggestion that culture may be an influential factor. More specifically, we are concerned with whether or not communication apprehension is more or less predictive of willingness to communicate as it interacts with different cultures.

The present study focused on the willingness to communicate of Micronesians, a cultural group that has been described as both extroverted and introverted (for a discussion of the extraversion-introversion construct see Eysenck, 1970, 1971). Mordeno, Cambra, & Klopf (1980a, 1980b) found Micronesians to project a positive communicator image. They claimed that, as a group, Micronesians find it easy to talk with others and perceive themselves to be friendly, dramatic, animated, and impression leaving. They also appeared to be interested in others, demonstrating goodwill in communication situations. It was also noted that their speaking tends to be exaggerated

and active nonverbally, being quite memorable to others who engage in conversations with them. This may be due to the heavy oral tradition operating within the Micronesian culture. Consequently, we may expect from this particular description that Micronesians are willing to communicate with others, but are they more or less so than Americans?

This last questions becomes important because other authors have described Micronesians in very different ways. For example, Ashby (1985) argued that Micronesians believed that it is generally virtuous to be quiet. While discussing child birth, Ashby explained that during labor, the expectant mother is expected to keep silent and show as little pain as possible. Harding and Wallance (1970) also seemed to believe that there is a "sensitivity to ridicule in the Ponapean personality." They claimed there are very few situations in which a Ponapean can show pride in his or her accomplishments or possessions without fear of criticism for pretentiousness or "acting big." Fear of unfavorable comment and gossip is sufficiently strong to enforce what seems to be a pattern of exaggerated modesty and humilty that pervades most social situations (Harding & Wallance, 1970, p. 88-89). More specifically, a Ponapean who approaches a potential employer for work without being asked to apply is considered forward, but even after being asked to apply for a position, a Ponapean who states his/her qualifications is perceived as "boasting." From this description, it would then appear that Micronesians may be less willing to communicate with others, as a means of avoiding ridicule.

The general conclusion that we can draw about whether or not Micronesians are predisposed to communicate based on cultural influences is still unclear. Perhaps another variable impacting Micronesians' degree of willingness or unwillingness to communicate is their self-perceived communication competence, as suggested by McCroskey & Richmond (1987) For instance, one of the authors, who interacts regularly with Micronesian college students, noticed that many Micronesians appear to be timid and shy with Americans. Upon questioning her students about their behavior, they responded that they are afraid of making a mistake in English or with a new idea and that's why they are quiet. This relationship between willingness to communicate and self-perceived communication competence has been found to be highly predictive in the United States (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986 b, c). Moreover, McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond (1985) found that, for Puerto Ricans at least, self-perceived communication competence in a second language is negatively related to CA in that language. In earlier studies (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986 a, b) it was determined that an individual's level of CA is predictive of one's willingness to communicate. These findings have important implications for this study because English is a second language for most Micronesians. English is also the common language between Micronesians and Americans, therefore we may expect the degree of perceived competence of the people involved to impact their communication interactions.

In this study Micronesians' communication apprehension, willingness to communicate, self-perceived communication competence, and introversion were measured and compared to normative data collected in the United States (McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985).

METHOD

Subjects:

Participants were 159 (42% females and 58% males) undergraduate students enrolled in 19 classes at the Community College of Micronesia, located on the Island of Pohnpei. The ages of respondents ranged from 17 to 49, with a mean age of 22.47.

Entities represented in this sample included Pohnpei, (47%) Kosrae (19%), Truk (12%), Yap (12%), Marshalls (6%), Palau (2%), Nukuro (1%), and Kapingamarangi (1%). The courses sampled fulfilled general education requirements across the college and students represented a diversity of major fields. All instruments were written in English, the commonly used and official language of Micronesia. Instruments were completed with no personal identification to insure anonymity and to increase the probability of honest responses.

Measures

All of the measures employed in this study were self-report scales. The measures employed are noted below:

Willingness to Communicate: The WTC scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) was used as the operationalization of willingness to communicate. This is a 20-item instrument with 12 items composing the measure and eight filler items. In a previous study (McCroskey & Baer, 1985) the internal (alpha) reliability reported for the total scale was .92. In the present study the reliability for the total scale was .86.

Self-Perceived Communication Competence: The SPCC scale developed by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986 c, 1988) was used as the operationalization of self-perceived communication competence. The SPCC scale consists of 12 items. Four communication contexts were included: public speaking, meetings, small groups, and dyads and three types of receivers (strangers, aquaintances, and friends). The internal (alpha) reliability estimates of the total scale in earlier research (McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, & Richmond, in press; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) were .92 and .93. The reliability of the scale in this investigation was .89.

Communication Apprehension: The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA24, McCroskey, 1982) was used as the operationalization of communication apprehension. Four contexts included public speaking, meetings, groups, and dyads. Previous internal (alpha) reliability estimates reported for the total score have ranged from .91 to .96. In the present study, the internal reliability estimate for the scale was .90.

Introversion: The measure used for introversion/extraversion was drawn from the work of Eysenck (1970, 1971). A total of eighteen items appeared on the instrument, 12 measuring introversion/extraversion and 6 neurotism items serving as fillers. The same items were used as were included in the earlier study reported by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986 a) The internal (alpha) reliability estimates of the scale used in earlier research were .77 and .78 . In the present study it was .69.

Data Analyses

The focus of the present study was on the differences between data generated from subjects in the United States and Micronesia. The data from earlier reports of research in the U.S. (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond, 1985; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986 a, b, c) were used in these comparisons. Means for the current data were computed for each instrument. Similarily, correlations among total scores were computed for each instrument. Differences between means of the U.S. and Micronesia samples were tested for significance with t-tests. For differences between correlations, z-tests were computed. The criterion for significance was set at alpha .05.

RESULTS

Table 1 reports the mean and standard deviation for each score on the WTC, SPCC, PRCA24, and Introversion instruments for both the present sample (Micronesia) and comparable groups in previous U.S. studies. Also reported are the mean differences between the two cultural groups and the t-test for each difference.

As reflected in Table 1, Micronesian students were significantly less willing to communicate and perceived themselves as being less communicatively competent, more apprehensive about communication, and more introverted. These findings were supported by subscores on each instrument (WTC, SPCC and PRCA24). Micronesians were found to be less willing to communicate, perceived themselves as less competent, and more apprehensive than Americans in the contexts of public speaking, meetings, groups, and dyads. Micronesian students also scored significantly lower in perceived competence and willingness to communicate with receivers who were strangers, acquaintances, or friends.

Table 2 reports the observed correlations among the measures for the samples from the two cultures and the z-tests for differences between the observed correlations. The correlation between WTC and communication apprehension (PRCA24) was identical for the two cultures. Correlations between introversion and both WTC and and CA were somewhat higher for the Micronesian group than for the American, while SPCC correlated more highly with introversion for the American group than the Micronesian group. However, the WTC/SPCC correlations were found to be significantly different at alpha .05, while the PRCA24/SPCC correlations were significantly different at only alpha=.06.

Table 3 reports the means, variances accounted for, and critical values for differences between males and females on each instrument. Previous U.S. studies have repeatedly found no sex differences between male and female subjects. However, significant differences were found between the sexes of Micronesians with regard to their willingness to communicate ($F=11.56$, $df=1/157$, $eta^2=.07$), self-perceived communication competence ($F=11.01$, $df=1/57$, $eta^2=.07$), and communication apprehension ($F=21.47$, $df=1/156$, $eta^2=.12$), with no reported sex differences in reported introversion.

DISCUSSION

The results of this investigation indicate that American and Micronesian college students differ in their reported magnitude of introversion, apprehension about communicating, self-perceived communication competence, and willingess to initiate communication with others. That is, Micronesians report themselves to be more apprehensive and introverted, while viewing themselves as less competent and willing to communicate than comparable Americans. However, both American and Micronesian students report themselves to be less willing to communicate when they fear communication events, or perceive themselves as introverts and/or incompetent communicators. The major difference between the two cultures appears to be in degree or intensity of their orientations. Therefore, a closer examination of the correlations among the measures may help to explain this difference.

It appears that Micronesians are different from Americans in their willingness to communicate more as a function of their self-perceived competence. Although U.S. studies have found that those people who view themselves as more competent and less apprehensive are more willing to communicate, and those people who perceive

themselves as less competent or more apprehensive are less willing to communicate, this Micronesian group has indicated that perceived competence may play a larger, more significant role in determining their predispostion toward communication. Self-perceived competence can predict 64 percent of the WTC variance for Micronesians, but only 35 percent for Americans.

Explaining these differences between American and Micronesian students may be found in examining the "language" used in their communication interactions. For example, nine different major languages with various dialectics are spoken by the people of Micronesia. Thus, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible for Micronesians to communicate with one another, let alone outsiders such as Americans, without using a lingua franca, which in this case is English. The English language for most Micronesians is their second language. Anyone who has ever had to use a second language to communicate may recall feelings of incompetence when doing so. The results in this study seem to be similar to what McCroskey, Fayer, And Richmond (1985) found with Puerto Ricans. That is, Puerto Ricans were far more apprehensive about communicating in their second language (English) than in their first language (Spanish). In addition, Puerto Rican's self-perceived competence in a second language was negatively related to their apprehension. This current study provides some additional information about communication orientations of people (Micronesians) who must communicate in a second language. That is, when using a second language, not only do people report to feeling apprehensive and less competent, they are also less willing to communicate. This has important implications because a great body of research (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) has indicated that "reduced willingness to communicate results in an individual being less effective in communication and generating negative perceptions of himself or herself in the minds of others involved in the communication" (p. 152). Consequently, Micronesians may experience more negative communication outcomes than Americans. As a result, Micronesian's resistance to communciation may affect their future success in achieving political, economic, and social status within an American influenced society.

With regard to the sex differences found between male and female Micronesians, it appears that the average female is highly apprehensive, while males are only moderately apprehensive. Males were also found to perceive themselves as more competent and prone to intiate communication, while being less introverted than female respondents in this study. Results such as these are not surprising given that most Micronesians live in highly traditional culture where chiefly hierarchies and class systems are alive and thriving (De Smith, 1970; "Trust Territories," 1984).

Finally, this investigation offers different conclusions about Micronesion's and American's communication orientations than found in earlier works (Bruneau, Cambra, & Klopf , 1980 Klopf, 1984). Micronesians are more apprehensive than Americans. Therefore, not only does this study provide an alternative explanation for Micronesians' communication orientations, it also helps to broaden the understanding of intercultural communication orientations in general. That is, circumstances which force individuals to use a second language to communicate with their own society may significantly impact their degree of perceived communication competence, communication apprehension, introversion, and most importantly willingness to communicate. Consequently, future studies comparing communication orientations between cultures should examine those communication orientations in both first and second languages, with a special emphasis upon the "commonly used" language.

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Footnotes

[1]The people native to these islands are classified as Micronesians, except for about 1,500 Polynesian inhabitants. Anthropological evidence indicates Southeast Asia and Malaysia as the origins of the Micronesian population (Harding & Wallace, 1970; Trust Territory, 1984). However, Micronesia has been known to the Western world since the 16th century when Spanish and Portuguese explorers first discovered the islands. Since the 17th century, traders, whalers, explorers, missionaries from Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and America have left their cultural imprint. Consequently, differing degrees of western acculturation can be found depending on the degree of contact with these various cultures.

Micronesia has been controlled by several foreign countries over the past century. In the 19th century, development of a successful copra trade brought about political conflict among Germany, Spain, and Great Britain, resulting in German commercial control and Spanish sovereignty. In 1898 Spain withdrew from the Pacific and sold all her remaining possessions, except Guam, to Germany. Germany's control ended in 1914 when the Japanese naval squadrons took over military possession of the Islands at the outbreak of World War I. Japan formally began its adminstriation by a League of Nations Mandate in 1920. During this period extensive settlement resulted in a Japanese population of over 100,000 as permanent residents, while the native Micronesian population approached only 40,000. During World War II, Micronesia became extremely important in the Pacific campaign. The area was secured by the United States forces and the Mariana, Caroline, and the Marshall Islands were made an U. S. trust territory by the United Nations following the war, while the Gilbert Islands became a British protectorate. In 1978, as a result of a split vote on a draft constitution, the islands began the process of separate recognition which resulted in the formation of the Republic of Belau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Currently, the United States recognizes the sovereignty of these nations and acts in an advisory role according to the 1986 Compact of Free Association.

Many language differences exist in Micronesia, although each language is comprised of a common Malayo-Polynesian source. Nine major languages, with dialectual variations, are spoken in Micronesia: Palauan, Yapese, Chamorro, Ulithuab-Woleaian, Trukese, Pohnpeian, Kosraean, Marshallese, and Kapingamarangi-Nukuoroan. Most islanders of the Islands know their native language and at least one other. In the islands that were heavily influenced by Japan, inhabitants know some conversational Japanese, but English is the official language and is taught in all of the schools. Moreover, because of the diversity of native languages, English has become the common language used among the people of Micronesia.

TABLE I
Mean, Standard Deviations, and Mean Comparisons
for Subscores and Total Scores on Measures**

Measures	(U.S.) Mean	(U.S.) S.D.	Micronesia Mean	Micronesia S.D.	U.S. X - (Micro X)	t*
WTC	63.1a	14.9	47.3	16.8	15.8	10.13
Public	52.2	20.4	47.0	20.9	5.2	2.60
Meeting	59.3	18.6	37.4	20.5	21.9	11.48
Group	68.1	16.4	55.2	20.9	12.9	6.87
Dyad	72.9	15.8	50.0	21.9	22.9	11.87
Stranger	35.6	21.3	22.9	21.1	12.7	12.68
Acquaintance	69.9	18.5	44.4	24.7	25.5	11.07
Friend	83.9	14.0	74.5	21.1	9.4	5.09
SPCC	73.7a	13.8	49.0	18.4	24.7	15.06
Public	68.8	17.8	35.8	14.2	33.0	22.30
Meeting	68.8	17.1	39.4	21.5	29.4	15.14
Group	76.1	14.6	53.8	21.0	22.3	12.11
Dyad	81.1	12.4	57.3	18.8	23.8	14.58
Stranger	55.5	23.6	25.4	22.1	30.1	13.87
Acquaintance	77.4	15.3	43.7	27.5	33.7	14.48
Friend	88.2	11.3	77.8	21.4	10.4	5.78
Introversion	19.0b	4.7	21.8	4.4	-2.8	-5.94
PRCA 24	65.6c	15.3	76.6	14.9	-11.0	-6.51
Public	19.3	5.1	21.7	4.0	-2.4	-4.71
Meeting	16.4	4.8	18.9	4.6	-2.5	-4.72
Group	15.4	4.8	17.3	4.4	-1.9	-7.04
Dyad	14.5	4.2	18.8	4.8	-4.3	-16.04

* $p < .05$ all t's are significant
** Converted to 0-100 scale
a) n =344
b) n=216
c) normative U.S. data (McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985).

TABLE 2
Correlations Among Communication Measures

Measure	U.S. r	U.S. n	Micronesia r	Micronesia n	z
WTC/PRCA 24	-.52	428	-.52	159	.00
WTC/SPCC	.59	344	.80	159	4.39*
WTC/Introversion	-.29	242	.41	159	1.33
PRCA24/SPCC	-.63	216	-.49	159	1.94**
PRCA24/Introversion	.33	216	-.37	159	.43
SPCC/Introversion	-.37	216	.36	159	.10

*p < .05
**P < .06

TABLE 3
Mean, Standard Deviations, and
Mean Comparisons for Sex on Measures

Measures	U.S. M/F**	Micronesia Males	Micronesia Females	eta^2	F Value
WTC	63.1	50.9	42.0	.07	11.56*
SPCC	73.7	52.8	43.3	.07	11.01*
Introversion	19.0	21.4	22.3	.01	1.50
PRCA24	65.6	72.2	82.8	.12	21.47*

* p < .05
** No significant difference found in U. S. samples